

Saving open-pollinated seeds is one step to self sufficiency

By Connie Glasheen

Saving seeds from year to year is one way I work toward self sufficient living. It's easy, and it allows me to grow varieties ideally suited to my family and our growing conditions here in Wisconsin.

I save seeds for dry beans, green beans, peas, pumpkins, acorn squash, tomatoes, peppers, and watermelon—quite a variety, but they all have one thing in common: they are all open pollinated varieties.

The reason for saving seeds from open pollinated (or non-hybrid) varieties is that they will produce offspring that will be similar to the parent plant. The hybrid varieties will not produce the same, as they have been crossed and re-crossed many times to breed out undesirable traits. These undesirable traits may show up in the offspring.

To save bean and pea seeds, I allow the pods to stay on the plant longer than normal. I wait until the leaves and pods are a yellowish straw color and are very brittle, usually four to six weeks after eating-fresh stage. If there is dry weather, the seeds will dry faster. I then remove the pods and spread them out on a screen or in baskets inside to dry further. Then I remove the seeds from the pods and store in clean canning jars in my kitchen closet.

For tomatoes, I pick perfectly ripe fruit, cut it in half and scoop out the pulpy mass that contains the seeds. I put the pulp into a jar or bowl, then I add a small amount of water. Every day I stir the tomato pulp, allowing it to ferment. (This smells, so I keep it in a well ventilated area.) After three to five days of fermenting, the good seed will sink to the bottom, and the pulp and bad seed will be floating on top. I remove the bad seed and pulp by

straining off the water. Then I rinse off the good seed and allow it to dry on paper towels. I store it in a jar.

For peppers and melons, I scoop out the seeds when they are fully ripe. I dry them on paper towels and store them in a jar.

For acorn squash and pumpkins, I allow the fruit to develop and ripen naturally. When it's time to cook squash or carve the pumpkins into jack-o'lanterns, I remove and dry the seeds. I also try to isolate my squash and pumpkins while growing so I don't get weird mutant strains from cross pollination.

Here are a couple of things I've found to be important:

- Use only open pollinated varieties.
- Save seed from healthy disease-free plants.
- Be sure seeds are dry before storing so they don't get moldy.

This year I'm going to try my hand at letting my broccoli go to seed and so further my goal of self sufficiency.

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